

News Release

Education Information Services ■ 125 South Webster Street ■ P.O. Box 7841 ■ Madison, WI 53707-7841 ■ (608) 266-3559

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Contact: Patrick Gasper, DPI Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

How did Green Bay end up with vouchers late on Friday night?

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers issued the following statement about last Friday's vote by the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance to expand vouchers in Green Bay.

“On a Friday night without any publicly shared drafts or public hearings, the forces behind taxpayer funding for private and religious schools struck again. A majority of the Joint Committee on Finance voted into the state budget expansion of the costly religious and private school voucher program for Green Bay.

“Green Bay property taxpayers are on track to pay millions for private and religious schools. At the same time, their public school system is being cut \$40 million, which will certainly raise class sizes and reduce educational opportunities for public school students. Wisconsin is now set to expand vouchers for private and religious schools, while making catastrophic cuts in funding for public schools. Everyone in our state, especially the people of Green Bay, need to ask some important questions.

Flip-flop? - What changed in less than 24 hours following reported comments by both committee co-chairs, Senator Alberta Darling and Representative Robin Vos, that there wasn't enough support for expansion to Green Bay? How did this action, called a flip-flop by a stunned and puzzled Green Bay Press-Gazette editorial board, happen late on Friday night?

Why this way? - Why would a former school board member, State Senator Luther Olsen, offer this motion, with another non-Green Bay legislator, Representative John Nygren, without any public input from the Green Bay School Board or public hearings in that area? What happened to local control and Senator Olsen's statement from three weeks before that he was 'not interested in dumping something on them'? Would he support this type of action to raise taxes in Berlin, his hometown?

No vote? - How much of a measure of support results from setting the bar to start the voucher program so low at only **6.7 percent of all eligible** Green Bay voters? The 'super-minority' support is no mandate for such a radical change in schooling and taxes for Green Bay. There is no vote or a public voice for those opposed to vouchers for Green Bay religious and private schools. How much of a sham is that? How is this democracy?

Higher taxes? - Raising taxes on the citizens of Green Bay and Racine in the dead of night, without public hearings or the support of their locally elected school officials echoes the type of

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non-representative, undemocratic actions taken by the English parliament against the American colonists through their stamp and tea taxes. Is this what we have come to in our great state of Wisconsin? Is this what we should expect from our state leaders?

What's next? - What should our 872,000 public school students, their parents, and taxpayers expect next from the paid advocates of taxpayer funding of private and religious schools? This track record indicates we won't know what it is before the next vote.

“This is just wrong. This is no way to set educational policy or improve our public schools. A state public school system that, I remind you, leads the nation in high school graduation. Our public schools are the center of communities across our state and the greatest driver of our future economic prosperity.

“The long-term implications of expanding vouchers for religious and private schools outside Milwaukee and to families with greater income are massive. At the same time we are defunding public education, how long will it take before taxpayers are paying a billion or more dollars a year for a statewide voucher system that supports unaccountable private and religious schools? On what night will that vote take place with no public debate?

“I agree with the [Green Bay Press-Gazette Editorial Board](#) that this voucher expansion needs to be taken out of the budget and a true local public debate needs to occur.”

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NOTES: A link to the Green Bay Press-Gazette editorial can be found at <http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/article/20110605/GPG0602/106050680/1269/gpg06/Editorial-Flip-flop-voucher-plan-concerning>. The Department of Public Instruction's memo to the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance regarding vouchers can be found at http://dpi.wi.gov/pb/pdf/budget_voucher_memo.pdf. This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2011_67.pdf.